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ABSTRACT

This article presents results from a survey involving 83 predominantly white, female, undergraduate and graduate preservice teachers at a small liberal arts college in Virginia. The preservice teachers were asked to complete a survey describing challenges they perceived they would encounter as future teachers required to work with culturally, linguistically, and special needs student populations. Additionally, the survey asked them to describe the skills necessary to help them face these challenges. Data analysis revealed that they had a high degree of uncertainty in teaching students with cultural and linguistic differences in comparison to teaching students with special needs. They believed that they needed courage and risk-taking skills to meet the challenge of diverse classrooms. Few students had given serious consideration to taking teaching jobs in urban schools rather than in their own communities. Many respondents expected their employers to provide inservice training on diversity rather than being responsible for their own professional development. Respondents' understanding of diversity tended to be superficial. Respondents expected there to be communication barriers and implied that it was important for minority students to be able to understand the teachers rather than the teachers to understand them. Respondents worried about being able to create a positive learning environment with equitable treatment for all. (Contains 13 references.) (SM)

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TEACHER EDUCATORS: A MINORITY PERSPECTIVE ON PREPARING MAJORITY PRE SERVICE TEACHERS FOR DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

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This article presents results from a survey conducted by non-American Black women professors involving eighty-three pre service teachers at a small liberal art's college in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. The pre service teachers were asked to complete a survey describing the challenges they perceived that they would encounter as future teachers required to work with culturally, linguistically, and special needs student populations. Additionally, they were asked to describe the skills necessary to help them face these challenges. The article concludes with implications for the Teacher Education Programs which continue to grapple with the gap in the lack of preparedness of pre service teachers to work with students who reflect a wide range of diverse needs.

A Need for Concern

This study was born out of shared concern that we as non-American Black women professors have experienced since we have begun teaching pre service teachers at a small liberal university in the Hampton Roads' region of Virginia. Our teacher education program consists of courses which address aspects of diversity including culture, linguistics, and special needs. The pre service enrolment of our program averages more than 95 percent white students who must complete these courses. Despite the successful completion of the courses, many of them do not feel confident to deal with the challenges of diversity in today's classrooms. We were interested

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in determining whether there was a difference in the level of confidence among beginning students, those students halfway through the program, and those students near completion. In addition, we were interested to observe what impact if any, our presence as minority professors and our classes had on preparing students to teach diverse learners.

We recognize that the future of the nation is dependent upon the schools of education to prepare teachers who can enable all of their students to learn in ways that will allow them to maximize their potentials to be successful in an increasing pluralistic, technological, and global society. The challenge for most teacher education programs is to prepare a large white and monolingual group of pre service teachers to successfully teach students who may not share their language and culture.

> ...[N]either the educational experiences nor the backgrounds and attitudes of prospective teachers equip them to participate in the culture of schooling envisioned for an increasingly pluralistic society (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory).

> ...[I]individuals are socialized within ethnic, racial, and cultural communities in which they internalize values, perspectives, ways of knowing, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge that can differ in significant ways from those individuals socialized within other microcultures (Banks, 1998, 7).

All cultures value and reward certain beliefs and actions while censoring or chastising others. Teachers like students, are members of various cultural groups. Similar to students, they bring their own values, perspectives, and ways of knowing into the classrooms. The challenge

arises when the teacher who serves as a mediator must define the accepted moral code of behavior in the classroom while suppressing and reprimanding other forms of behaviors. There is no universal code or set of values that any culture can ascribe to and herein lies the problem. The codes that a teacher enforces in a culturally diverse classroom has tremendous impact on all concerned. If the codes reaffirm a student's cultural belief and practice then a more conducive learning environment has been created for the child (Darling-Hammond, 1993; Neito, 1996). However, a discordance of codes can result in misunderstandings, confusion, and tenuous relations between teachers and students when they don't share languages and cultures and they fail to develop congruent ways of communicating and share understanding (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 1998; Delpit, 1995; Garcia, 1994).

As non-Americans Black women, we have experienced situations in which there have been misunderstandings because of a discordance of the language usage and culture in our respective predominantly white classrooms. Many of our pre service interns will experience situations similar to ours and will be teaching students with whom they do not have a shared culture and language usage. Based on these realities and our personal experiences, we contend that it is imperative that teacher education programs prepare pre service teachers to be more understanding and committed to issues of diversity while providing them with the skills necessary to achieve success in diverse classroom settings.

Projected Trends

Christopher Newport University (CNU) is a small liberal art's university located in the Hampton Roads region of Virginia. In the teacher education program at CNU, the student enrolment is more than 95% white while the faculty enrolment is 28% minorities due to our

presence. Given the small number of faculty in the teacher education program, most of the students take at least one course from each of us before completing their program of studies. CNU's teacher education program works closely with four local school districts: Hampton, Newport News, Poquoson, and York County. The 1998 enrolment statistics revealed that Hampton had approximately 40% white and 60% nonwhite students (23,000 total student population); Newport News had 42% white and 58% nonwhite students (33, 000 total student population); Poquoson had 97% white and 3% nonwhite (2,400 total student population), and York County had 76% white and 24% nonwhite students (11,500 total student population). Newport News recorded the highest percentage students categorized as English as a Second Language (ESL) which was less than 0.7% of the total student population. Out of the four local school districts, Newport News and Hampton both urban districts will likely serve as employers for the majority of our graduates.

Although the number of minority students continues to increase in classrooms across the nation, simultaneously the number of minority teachers is declining. In 1991 minorities represented 15.3% of new K-12 teachers and that percentage continues to drop (NEA). Garcia (1994) projects that by year 2026, 70 per cent of the student enrolment will be nonwhite and Hispanic and that 25 per cent of the total students population will have limited proficiency in English. The importance of having teachers who share and can affirm the students' cultural practices cannot be underestimated. However, this in no way implies that only teachers from a student's cultural group can be effective and sensitive to the needs of students in other cultural groups.

The population of teachers, teacher educators, and administration continues to be

predominantly white (Kings, Hollins, Hayman, 1997; Ryan and Cooper, 1998). As a result, more nonwhite students are being taught by white teachers and given the decreasing numbers of minorities entering the field of education this trend will continue. This is a disturbing situation which we as Black women educators are committed to addressing but this does not diminish the importance we place on preparing our majority white student population for diverse classrooms. In light of current trends, it is inevitable that every professional educator at some point in their career will teach in an educational setting in which the students are racially, culturally, or linguistically diverse. If these teachers are to be effective then they will need to understand, value, and affirm the diversity in its many forms in classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 1993; Irwin, 1997).

Survey Methodology

Eighty-three pre service teachers representing three different groups of students in our teacher education program (undergraduate and graduate) participated in the study. Group one consisted of students completing their first education course and thirty hours of field experience at two different grade levels. Group two comprised students one semester away from student teaching having completed three quarters of the teacher education program. The third group comprised students completing course work for the Masters of Arts in Teaching. In addition this group having limited field experience was also one semester away from student teaching. The racial/ethnic compositions of the respondents were 82 White students and 1 African American student while the gender distribution was 65 females and 18 male students. Also, every one of the participants had at least one urban school placement and had taken at least one course taught by us.

At the conclusion of the semester in their respective courses, the participants were asked to respond to two questions designed to enlighten their concerns and issues in respect to working with diverse student groups. It was not a mandatory requirement for any of their courses and if they chose to participate, they would remain anonymous. The study was similar to Goodwin's study (1994) in terms of the pre service background of the participants and the nature of questions posed. Each participant was asked to respond in writing to the following questions:

1. Describe at least three challenges that you perceive for teaching a culturally, linguistically, and special needs student population.

2. What skills do you believe will enable you to address the challenges described?

The students had several days to construct their responses. Many of the participants' responses contained elaborations which varied in length and detail. There was a 100% return rate of the survey.

Survey Analysis

The responses were coded and scored according to common themes and words. Initially the sorting of the participants' perceived challenges and needed skills resulted in lists totaling 24 and 21 respectively. We reexamined the data looking for major themes or concepts within each list. We discovered that there existed overlap in some of the responses which allowed us to cluster responses into larger and more encompassing categories. For example, responses for perceived challenges in our first sorting included: being aware of and eliminating cultural biases, developing cultural understanding, and learning to construct lessons that meet the [cultural] needs of all students. We grouped these responses together under the central challenge which we identified as: lack of knowledge and understanding of other cultures. We applied this analytical

process to the second round of sorting and arrived at the results shown in Figure 1. (See page 9)

The pre service teachers' responses to the survey revealed a high degree of uncertainty in teaching students with cultural and linguistic differences in comparison to teaching students with special needs. The students with disabilities or high learning abilities were viewed by pre service teachers as more teachable provided that resources and support in the classrooms were made available. However the cultural and linguistic groups of students posed more of a challenge because pre service teachers saw a need to learn another language and to learn more about the culture of these students. The participants' responses included such terms "needing courage" and "risk-taking" when identifying the skills they needed to address the challenges of teaching diverse cultural and linguistic groups of students.

The notion of "needing courage" and "taking-risks" as skills needed to meet the challenge of diverse classrooms was a surprise finding since all of the respondents had at least one field placement in urban schools in the Hampton Roads area and they had been by taught by at least one professor in the Teacher Education Program who is a non-American Black woman. Furthermore, our findings revealed that more than 50% of the pre service teachers expected to receive teaching positions in their own communities. Few had given serious consideration to being placed in urban school settings in Hampton and Newport News and therefore learning to "take risks" was a skill they perceived that would be only required for diverse class settings.

Also, many pre service teachers expected their employers to provide in-service training for dealing with diverse populations, thereby accepting little responsibility for their own professional development. Many respondents expressed frustration and a sensation of being overwhelmed because they did not have the "nuts and bolts" needed to meet the challenges of

diversity. Their understanding of diversity appeared to be superficial because the majority of respondents believed that to be successful in diverse classrooms meant applying a particular technique or having various resources available. The respondents seem contented to place responsibility for developing or acquiring needed skills with their professor and their future school's administrators. In other words, their development as effective teachers in terms of meeting the challenges of working with diversity in the classroom largely depended upon the level of support from administrators and the availability of resources.

Another consistent response to the question of perceived challenges was the expectation that there would be communication barriers. Their comments implied that it was important for cultural and linguistic groups of students to be able to understand them as teachers rather than a need for teachers to learn how to communicate with the students and parents. Surprisingly 60% percent of the respondents expressed the need to learn another language to better communicate with students from different linguistic backgrounds. The respondents recognized that learning another language is time consuming and at best choosing "Spanish" would be the most appropriate language for them to learn. We were unable to explain the perceived need of the respondents to learn another language in particular Spanish when the local demographics reveal that less than 0.2% of the total student population in the Hampton Roads area speaks Spanish. This became even more difficult to explain when the majority of respondents indicated a desire to seek employment in the local area.

The respondents worried about being able to "create positive learning environments" in which all students would be treated fairly. Even though more than 50% of the respondents indicated that they are willing to take on challenges associated with diversity many expressed

concern about the political correctness of being fair and treating "everybody" fairly. For many respondents, "to be treated fairly" was synonymous with "to be treated equally". Many pre service teachers had difficulty reconciling that equitable treatment did not necessarily mean equal treatment nor did equitable treatment mean that certain groups of students would be excluded from achieving academic success.

Figure 1: Recurring Concepts

Perceived Challenges	**Perceived Skills Needed to Meet Challenges**
* Lack of knowledge and cultural understanding of other cultures *Issue of fairness and an exclusion of one group in order to meet the needs of another group * Being flexible and opened-minded while avoiding the stereotypes * Learning to maintain patience and empathy * Handling the language barrier * Creating a positive learning environment	* Using appropriate lesson adaptations to meet the learning needs of all students * Seeking help from co-workers * Being prepared and organized * Being flexible and opened-minded * Communicating with parents from diverse backgrounds *Learning to maintain patience and empathy *Being a risk taker

The skills listed in Figure 1 demonstrated the confusion over the matching of perceived skills needed to address the challenges noted in the respondents answers. In several situations,

the perceived challenges were also identified as needed skills. The respondents' comments such as patience, empathy, open-mindedness, and flexibility are personal qualities. As professors, we model these traits in our classrooms and talk about the importance of such traits but we do not explicitly teach them. Furthermore, the identified perceived challenges and skills are not unique to issues of diversity rather they are qualities that important if teachers are to be effective. It was very disturbing to discover that there was little difference among the three groups involved in the study in terms of their perceived challenges and needs. The pre service teachers appeared to be unaware of their own biases or personal beliefs and they did not indicate a need to examine their own biases and personal beliefs about teaching in culturally diverse classrooms.

Implication and Conclusions

As non-American Black women professors, we were concerned about the pre service teachers' perception of their lack of preparedness for diverse classrooms especially given the fact that these students have been exposed to a variety of pedagogical content knowledge and field experiences concerning diversity. Despite the students seemingly at ease in our classrooms and discussing issues of diversity, our influences as Black women from a different cultural setting had minimal impact upon their thinking and had little transferability to diverse classroom settings. It was apparent that many of the pre service teachers had not developed a comfort level that would enable them to be confident and competent in a diverse classroom setting.

The courses offered in our teacher education program provides the students with a theoretical understanding of how to include all students and knowing when to use diverse teaching strategies. The program does not supply students with a "bag of nuts and bolts". The responses indicate that the pre service teachers are expecting to be handed a "bag of nuts and

bolts" that would allow them to handle every possible situation they might encounter. Before pre service teachers can be expected to understand and address issues of diversity in the classroom, they need opportunities to critically examine their own values, belief system, and cultural heritage (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Jordan 1995).

> ...begin with our own histories as human beings and as educators; our experiences as members of particular races, classes, and genders ... a close look at the tacit assumptions we make about motivations and behaviors of other children, other parents, and other teachers and about the pedagogies we deem most appropriate for learners who are like us or not like us (Cochran-Smith, 1995, p.500).

According to Garcia (1994) sensitivity toward "culture," while a necessary step, is not enough for teachers to allow for cultural differences. Garcia suggests that to be effective teachers in the diverse classroom, all teachers must meet three requirements. First, they must be personally committed to the belief that an equitable education is due to all students and be willing to make personal investments in the contribution needed for culturally diverse students to receive an equal opportunity to achieve success. Second, teachers must be intimately knowledgeable about various strategies that can be used to enhance learning environment for different cultural and linguistic groups of students. Specifically, teachers need a broad knowledge base from which they could construct meaning of how to work with diversity while recognizing that there is no "one" strategy that will work for all students of a particular cultural background. The third essential ingredient suggested by Garcia is the need for educational leadership beyond professional development. He suggested that the leadership to mobilize this

commitment and knowledge is dependent upon leaders who are risk-takers and can rise above being overwhelmed and frustrated. Changes need to be made in the teacher education program which would provide opportunities for pre service teachers to develop skills not only in the rudiments of blending content with pedagogy but to experience authentic learning situations which must extend beyond the walls of the teacher education classrooms. Korthagen and Kessels (1999) state that much of the theory taught in education programs remains unclear to student teachers and has little relevancy unless they have personal concerns or have encountered concrete situations. It is at this point when transferability of theory into practice becomes a reality for our pre service teachers. We propose authentic situations which would provide opportunities for theory to be linked to practice. Such authentic learning situations which would enable pre service teachers to:

1. experience working with parents, co-workers, students, administrators in empowering school environments. The pre service teachers need to see a myriad of situations where students are active, self-directed learners who are capable of making decisions that enhance their learning.
2. observe how students and parents' concerns are respected and validated. That is, to observe an acceptance of and support for cultural identities, languages, and learning needs found in the classrooms.
3. observe schools that provide meaningful ways to involve parents or guardians which will support their children's opportunities for academic success.

In addition to incorporating these types of authentic learning situations in our teacher

education program, we further propose the following changes:

1. a focus on developing communication skills of all kinds including those needed for parent-conferencing and consulting/collaboration with co-workers;
2. develop an awareness about political, economic, and power relationships in the political worlds of schools (local, regional, national, transnational world of politics);
3. develop self-confidence to believe that they are catalysts for change.

These recommended changes would enable pre service teachers to be in environments that will enable them to better understand and value the diversity in classrooms. Having pre service teachers immersed in cultural contexts different from their own will allow them to confront many of their fears and misconceptions. The pre service teachers, while challenging and reshaping their perceptions will begin to develop their own framework of teaching diverse learners through the dynamic interaction of their authentic experiences and the theoretical learnings of the education program.

Finally, as non-American Black women we have learned that our personal interactions with students coupled with teaching multicultural education courses have had little impact on helping our pre service teachers to establish a comfort level with issues of diversity. Many of our students have never been taught by a Black person, let alone non African-American women and our classes provide their first personal encounter grappling with issues of culture and diversity. Although we continue to accept the many challenges inherent in our unique positions as minority professors, we recognize that despite program changes we cannot ensure that all of our students are fully prepared for diverse classrooms. However at the very least, we contend that our

program must prepare pre service teachers to be aware of their own cultural awareness as it relates to issues of diversity and learn how to interact comfortably with diverse groups of students in positive learning environments.

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